NATIONAL WORK READINESS COUNCIL

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

TO DELIVER NATIONAL WORK READINESS CREDENTIAL
ASSESSMENTS
BY COMPUTER
AND TO PROVIDE RELATED SERVICES

ISSUED: FEBRUARY 15, 2006
PROPOSALS DUE: MARCH 31, 2006

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INTRODUCTION

General Purpose of the Request for Proposals (RFP)
The National Work Readiness Council (NWRC) seeks a partner (hereinafter referred to as "delivery partner") to perform test delivery, scoring, reporting, and related services (including ongoing item development and test construction based on the existing assessment instrument) for its National Work Readiness Certification assessments. This Request for Proposals (RFP) sets forth details of NWRC requirements related to those services, with a signed agreement expected no later than May 10, 2006. Any contract issued as a result of this RFP is expected to be for a period of three to five years.

The delivery partner should be interested in working with the National Work Readiness Council to position this credential as a nationally recognized certification and credential for a potentially large market that includes large, medium and small employers, government agencies, organizations that provide workforce development services, colleges, and schools.

Key Dates

RFP is issued	February 15 2006
NWRC receives proposals	March 31, 2006
Reviewers complete review	April 21, 2006
NWRC requests further information	April 25, 2006
Additional Information due	May 1, 2006
Review of additional information/scheduling of negotiations	May 2-5, 2006
Award of contract	May 10, 2006
Delivery partner begins transition	May 15, 2006
Delivery partner completes system testing	45-60 days after transition begins
Operational testing begins	no later than 60 days after transition begins

Background
The National Work Readiness Credential has been developed by a partnership of five states – Florida, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Washington – and the District of Columbia, with support from the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), an independent federal organization, and JA Worldwide (formerly known as Junior Achievement), a national nonprofit that prepares young people for the world of work. The purpose is to ultimately reduce and lessen the burdens of federal and state governments in promoting work preparation and readiness among the adult population. Development of the Credential has been guided by advice from national business organizations including the Center for Workforce Preparation (CWP), US Chamber of Commerce, the Center for Workforce Success, National Association of

Manufacturers (NAM) and the National Retail Federation Foundation (NRFF), as well as from a wide variety of companies doing business in the partner states and other locations. Recently, JA Worldwide is one of several national leadership organizations, including the National Governors Association, and the Institute for Educational Leadership, that also provide guidance and advice to the project.

The National Work Readiness Credential has been developed to provide a national, portable assessment-based certification that affirms individual job seekers have demonstrated the foundation knowledge and skills that are needed for competent performance as entry-level workers.[1]

The Credential has been developed in response to persistent reports from employers across industry sectors that they are having great difficulty finding applicants for entry-level jobs who possess the requisite knowledge and skills to be successful in those jobs. Data from the General Educational Development (GED) program of the America Council on Education find that more than 32 million adults in the U.S. lack a high school diploma. Roughly 800,000 of these earn the GED each year. The recently completed National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), which surveyed the actual literacy skills of the U.S. population, found that 63 million adults in the U.S. have only basic literacy skills. This includes individuals from 16-65 whose demonstrated level of skill is below the high school graduation level regardless of their level of educational attainment. It also includes immigrants to the U.S. whose first language may not be English.

All of these individuals are potential candidates for the National Work Readiness Credential which is designed to be a valid predictor of competent entry-level work. By differentiating between entry-level candidates who are work ready and those who are not, the WRC will identify a pool of work ready applicants from which employers can select candidates. In this way, the WRC will streamline the hiring process for employers. The WRC will also enable the workforce investment system and other workforce intermediaries to efficiently and reliably prepare individuals for entry-level work, and to reliably identify and consistently refer work ready applicants for entry-level jobs. In this way, the WRC will facilitate initial entry into employment for individual jobseekers.

To facilitate operation of the National Work Readiness Credential certification program, the National Work Readiness Council (NWRC)has been incorporated as a District of Columbia nonprofit corporation, and will seek tax exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Ownership of the assessment and certification will be held by the NWRC and all contracts for operation of the certification program will be with the NWRC. Operation of the certification program will be supported by revenues generated by the assessments and any other value-added products and services related to the certification process.

Guiding Principles for WRC Certification System Design and Implementation

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[1] *Entry-level jobs are non-supervisory, non-managerial, nonprofessional positions. These may be unskilled positions or they may be skilled positions where the required job-specific skills can be learned while on the job.*

The founding states and partners have agreed upon a set of key principles to guide operation of the credential delivery system. These include:

1. Ensure **access to opportunities** to prepare for and take the assessment for the diverse population of job seekers and potential job seekers who may seek to pass the WRC assessment and earn the credential.

All aspects of the credential delivery system will be designed to ensure accessibility to members of the population(s) who will be targeted, including all demographic groups and persons with disabilities.

2. Ensure that the credential has **credibility with and value to employers** by maintaining high standards and a commitment to continuous improvement.

The processes that are put in place must assure employers that the National Work Readiness Credential can be trusted to produce work ready applicants. These include processes for ensuring that:

- Delivery of the assessment is reliable and secure;
- The credentialing process is fair and legally defensible so that employers can rely on it without fear of legal consequences; and
- The standard and the assessment on which the credential is based are updated periodically to ensure that they remain current.

3. Support **national portability** by assuring consistency of administration across the country.

The policies and procedures established for governance and administration must ensure the consistency of processes from state to state that, in turn, will ensure credibility and accountability across the country, enabling the credential to garner public recognition and national support.

4. Be **voluntary**.

Use of the credential shall be voluntary for all parties, including employers, job seekers, and education and training vendors.

5. Be **financially viable**.

All aspects of the credential delivery system must be designed to maximize reasonableness of implementation costs for states and individual assessment sites.

The partners have not yet determined what fees to charge for the assessment and the credential. Final determination of fees is dependent upon completion of a business plan for the NWRC and negotiation of a contract with a delivery partner. In the meantime the partners have agreed upon a set of principles to guide bidders in developing a business model and proposing a pricing strategy based on that model. These principles include:

a) **Affordability** – testing fees should not be a barrier to use for any of the categories of users.
b) **Accessibility** – opportunities to take the tests and earn the credential should be available through a wide variety of public and private organizations in order to assure that such opportunities are available to the broadest spectrum of potential test takers.
c) **Sustainability** – sufficient revenue should be generated from testing fees to support governance, management, marketing, evaluation, and continuous improvement (updating) of the credential.

d) **Competitive** – testing fees for the credential should be aligned with the fees charged for other assessments currently marketed to similar populations for related assessment and credentialing purposes (e.g., the GED and Work Keys).

Additional information about the National Work Readiness Credential can be found at www.uschamber/cwp/strategies/workreadinesscredential.htm and http://eff.cls.utk.edu/workreadiness.htm

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Program Status

The National Work Readiness Credential is based on a standard for entry-level work readiness. The standard was defined by collecting and aggregating information across industry clusters to create a cross-industry composite profile. This profile reflects the knowledge, skills, and abilities that front line workers, supervisors, managers, and other workforce experts agree are most important to successful performance of entry-level work in the 21st century workplace.

The skills addressed in the standard include: communication, interpersonal, problem solving and learning skills, as well as applied reading and math.[2]

The workplace responsibilities addressed in the standard include: acquire and use information to get the job done; use appropriate technology; work with others; solve problems; understand and use systems; demonstrate responsible behaviors at work; learn new skills to meet new job challenges.[3]

The development and validation of the credential and assessment have been carried out by an assessment team led by SRI International[4] and guided by the AERA/APA/NCME Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (1999) and by the Uniform Employee Selection Guidelines (CFR 28.50.14) adopted by the EEOC, the Civil Service Commission, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Justice to provide a framework for proper use of tests and other selection procedures. Special attention has been given to these guidelines in the methods, samples, and procedures used to:

- Define the work readiness profile of tasks and behaviors that are critically important to entry-level work in multiple work situations in multiple industry clusters and the knowledge and skills that are important to competent performance of those work tasks and work behaviors.

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[2] Equipped for the Future (EFF) Applied Learning Standards are used to define the skills addressed in the National Work Readiness Credential Standard and measured in the assessments. See http://eff.cls.utk.edu/fundamentals/16_standards.htm

[3] SCANS competencies are used to organize entry-level tasks and behaviors in the National Work Readiness Credential Standard.

[4] Human Resource Research Organization (HumRRO), Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), and PowerTrain are subcontractors to SRI for this project.

- Develop instruments that assess whether individuals can use targeted knowledge and skills to solve work-related problems at a level that is commensurate with the entry-level profile defined by business.
- Validate the instruments/assessment package, including use of a sample that is of sufficient size and diversity to determine whether it is a fair assessment package and a valid predictor of competent entry-level work.

The field test of the assessment package was completed in February, 2006. Field test sites included a wide range of venues that are likely to be testing sites for the assessments including one-stop career centers, community colleges, schools, community based organizations, and businesses. Recommendations for passing scores for each assessment will be approved by the NWRC Partnership Council in April 2006.

Although the timeline is ambitious, the test development team expects to be ready to begin to transfer the assessments and related materials to the new delivery partner by May 15, 2006 so that operational testing for the National Work Readiness Credential can begin on schedule in July 2006.

Test Description
The assessment package for the National Work Readiness Credential consists of four, newly developed assessment instruments based on Equipped for the Future (EFF) standards:
1) The National Work Readiness Situational Judgment Test (WR-SJT),
2) The National Work Readiness Use Math to Solve Problems and Communicate Test (WR-Math),
3) The National Work Readiness Read With Understanding Test (WR-Reading), and
4) The National Work Readiness Oral Language Test (WR-OLT).

These four assessment instruments cover the full range of foundation skills and tasks identified by business as critically important to competent performance by entry-level workers. Together they address nine Equipped for the Future standards: *Read with Understanding; Speak so others can Understand; Listen Actively; Observe Critically; Cooperate with Others; Resolve Conflict and Negotiate; Use Math; Solve Problems and Make Decisions;* and *Take Responsibility for Learning*. An optional module may be developed to assess a tenth EFF standard, *Use Information and Communications Technology*.

The Work Readiness Situational Judgment Test (WR-SJT) assesses 5 EFF standards (*Observe Critically*; *Cooperate with Others*; *Resolve Conflict and Negotiate*; *Solve Problems and Make Decisions*; and *Take Responsibility for Learning*). The WR-SJT consists of 40 items. Each item consists of a brief (1 to 3 sentences) written scenario that describes a situation and a problem that requires a decision to be made. For each scenario, test takers are presented with a set of 4 options (each describing a plausible response to the problem, with some options better than others) and are asked to select the option that represents the best course of action and also the option that represents the worst course of action to be taken in the situation.

The Work Readiness Use Math to Solve Problems and Communicate (WR-Math) and **Read with Understand (WR-Reading) Tests** each address the single EFF standard designated by their respective titles. Each test consists of 25 multiple choice items.

Test takers are presented with four response options and are asked to choose the one best response.

The Work Readiness English Oral Language Test (WR-OLT) assesses the EFF standards *Speak So Others Can Understand* and *Listen Actively*. The WR-OLT is a computer-based simulation of a face-to-face Oral Proficiency Interview. The WR-OLT consists of five sets of three listening and speaking tasks. There are five versions of the test, each one contextualized within one of the following industry clusters: clerical, sales, service, manufacturing, construction. Every task includes written and audio directions, an accompanying graphic, and an audio prompt. Test takers respond orally to each prompt (for up to 1 minute) and their spoken responses are recorded. Raters trained according to protocols developed during the field test evaluate and rate the recorded responses using criteria aligned with the EFF skills *Listen Actively* and *Speak So Others Can Understand* as they are applied to tasks in the EFF Work Readiness Profile.

Computer-based Online Delivery

The National Work Readiness Credential Assessment Package is designed to be delivered by computer via an online methodology at proctored assessment sites. The test is not timed; however, it should take most test takers no longer than two or two and one-half hours to complete the entire assessment package.

Each assessment instrument is a separate module. Test takers can complete 1, 2, 3, or all 4 modules in one sitting. Test takers that elect to take the assessments in multiple sittings must complete all four modules within a period of no longer than 30 days in order for the tests to be scored as a single attempt to earn the credential. Unsuccessful candidates may have up to one year to retake the assessments.[5]

The four instruments share a common portal and are linked by a common look and functional design elements (including common graphics, color scheme, navigation bar, help features, etc). Audio voiceovers are available to test takers for the WR-Situational Judgment and WR-Math tests and for the instructions for the WR-Reading test.

The system specifications used for the field test are:

Server Platform Requirements:
- Windows Server running Server 2003 with latest operating system service packs installed with adequate client licenses for the number of simultaneous test takers.
- Database: Access Open DataBase Connectivity (ODBC) drivers for MDB database
- Site execute permissions set to process ASP scripts
- ASP.Net server application active to support uploading audio files recorded by users to the data directory.
- Bandwidth to accommodate required number of simultaneous test takers. Each person taking the test will receive up to 30 Megabytes of data over a three-hour period.

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[5] The NWRC is currently developing specific policies for assessment completion and retake.

- Ports 80 and 443 available for communications
- Server Applet for Browser audio recording: VIMAS Voice Recording Applet SDK: http://www.vimas.com/ve_record_applet_sdk.htm
- Site file storage: Live site 50 Meg of graphics, HTML, ASP, and audio files. Dev/Test staging site same size.
- User data file storage to date 500 users less than 50 Megabytes – Average 100K per user of audio files and database storage.
- Mirror or RAID 5 disk array for continual data back-up
- Off-site data back-up nightly
- HTTPS secure sockets layer certificate.
- DNS for live and dev sites using same primary domain.

User Platform Requirements:
- Windows Computer running 98, ME, 2000, or XP with latest operating system service packs installed
- Internet Explorer 5 or later (current is 6: Microsoft Link)
- Windows Media Player 7 or later (current is 10, Microsoft Link)
- Standard Windows Java console at least version 2.0 must be active (restore from Java.com if disabled. Latest is Java 5.0)
- Pop-Ups from NWRC.Biz not blocked. Verify: http://nwrc.biz/ opens a pop-up.
- Security settings to allow or prompt for Java applets. VIMAS Voice Recording Applet must be allowed to record user audio.
- Sound card with drivers including microphone input and audio not muted with adequate volume levels for playback and recording: verify using the Development site on-line at: http://dev.nwrc.biz/record_test.asp no sign-in required.
- Headset with microphone connected to sound card for playing and recording audio with microphone turned on: Audio test: http://dev.nwrc.biz/record_test.asp
- Internet connection with sufficient bandwidth for all test participants (note each participant will require up to 30 Megabytes of data downloaded to them)
- No firewall blocking streaming media such as WMA audio.
- Mouse and keyboard
- Monitor set to at least 800 by 600 resolution, 1024 by 768 is recommended

Test Scoring & Reporting

Three of the four assessments can be machine-scored immediately. The WR-OLT must be scored by trained raters who review audio files and rate them according to a rubric prepared by the test developers. It takes 12 minutes on average to score both the listening and speaking portions of a candidate record. The test developers have developed a rater training that produces reliable results after one day's training. Once the rater demonstrates reliability, only one rater is required to review each candidate audio file. There will be double rating of a certain percentage of candidate records to assure continuing inter-rater reliability as well as ongoing monitoring of rater reliability.

While each of the four assessments will have a separate passing point, candidates will not receive individual reports on the assessments but will receive a single report that represents a composite of successful performance across all four tests. As a result, candidates will not receive their test results immediately, but must wait until 10 days

to two weeks after the OLT is taken to allow time for it to be rated, and the results added to the other scores to determine if the candidate has earned the Work Readiness Credential. *An individual's 'score' on the NWRC will be pass or no pass, which corresponds with 'work ready' or 'needs more skill development to demonstrate work readiness'.*

Individuals who do not pass the assessment will receive a 'diagnostic report' that identifies skill areas in which they need to improve in order to earn the Credential.

Ownership of Materials
The National Work Readiness Council will retain all ownership of its questions, the assessment, and the practice assessment. It will also retain ownership of all new assessment items and forms developed for the NWRC and all data produced and collected through the testing process. The delivery partner must agree to assign in the formal agreement any and all copyrights to the questions, assessments, and related products to NWRC. The delivery partner must gain permission from the NWRC to use this data in analyses and reports prepared for purposes other than reporting to the NWRC. The NWRC also will own ancillary materials such as the Candidate Handbook and the Administration and Scoring Manual for Assessment Sites.

SERVICES REQUESTED

Overview of Services

The NWRC seeks a full service delivery partner that can perform the following range of activities:

- all services related to internet-based delivery of the WRC assessments including services related to all aspects of candidate processing,
- services related to ongoing validation and periodic updating of the assessment instruments,
- a range of program management services, including management of a secure registry of successful candidates and management of licenses for volume users.

NWRC uses the term 'delivery *partner*' to convey that our intention is for more than a vendor that will adhere to the letter of the contract with no attention to the spirit of the enterprise. The NWRC seeks a vendor who will actively partner with us to enhance the quality of the assessment, to maintain the validity and relevance of the credential, and to extend the reach of the assessments and credential through creative marketing and distribution agreements. However, the relationship will not be a legal partnership and the formal agreement will make it clear that no legal partnership, joint venture, or agency relationship is created or intended.

The delivery partner will:

- enter the WRC assessments into its own computer-interactive test delivery system,
- provide for candidates to register for the assessment,
- schedule candidates to sit for the assessment,
- deliver the assessment, providing accommodations where appropriate
- score each candidate's responses according to scoring rules provided by the NWRC,
- report the results to candidates upon completion of all four assessments,
- provide the NWRC with full access to the record of each candidate's testing session electronically,
- provide the NWRC with summaries and statistical analyses of candidate, item, and test performance, and
- build and maintain a secure web-based registry of successful candidates who have earned the credential.

The delivery partner will also provide a range of assessment development services, including:

- publish and provide for general public access to a computer-interactive preview version of the assessment,
- maintain and expand the current item bank of validated items to produce at least two new forms of the test;
- aggregate and analyze data to support ongoing validation of the assessment.

It is expected that the delivery partner will work closely with the current test development team to ensure that all systems are working appropriately before operational testing commences.

NWRC requirements for each of these services are delineated in this RFP under "Description of Services." To be responsive to this RFP, bidders must describe in detail how they will provide each of the services outlined in the Description of Services below.

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES

Test Hosting and Delivery Services

Test Registration
At a minimum, the delivery partner will provide for candidates to register for the assessment via the Internet. Bidders are encouraged to offer options to individual candidate registration via the Internet. Such options may include telephone and/or fax registration services and batch registration by an organization. In their cost proposal, bidders should delineate cost implications of any registration options proposed in addition to Internet registration.

The delivery partner will collect payment for assessments. Bidders should describe types of payment that may be accepted and address how payment may be obtained from agencies/organizations (e.g., one-stop career centers, employers, educational institutions) for groups or individuals while permitting the individuals themselves to register for and schedule assessments.

Test Scheduling
The delivery partner will provide automated scheduling for the assessment, notify candidates of appointments, and provide candidates with any specific instructions not covered in the Candidate Handbook that may be required to sit for the tests. Bidders should describe how their system for registration and scheduling will take into account candidates who opt to take less than all four tests at a single sitting and what procedures they will put in place for individuals who need to retake an assessment. Bidders should also describe their policies regarding postponement or rescheduling of a testing appointment.

Test Delivery
The delivery partner's system must be capable of delivering, scoring, and analyzing the existing tests as described in this RFP. (See Program Description in particular.) The test has been field tested in a range of private sites in the U.S. The NWRC expects that the tests will be administered in a similar range of sites that are screened and authorized by the NWRC, then set up, certified (if necessary), and maintained by the delivery partner. The tests may also be administered in delivery partner network sites, if available.

The delivery partner must provide for testing at private sites designated by the NWRC using the delivery partner's software. Private sites currently include one-stop career centers, employers, educational institutions (community colleges, schools, and community-based organizations offering education and training).

Bidders must describe their requirements for private sites and their process and procedures for certifying private test sites to ensure that the test performs as intended. Such description must include minimum hardware and software specifications, physical space needs, test administrator and proctor training, and any other requirements noted by the bidder. Bidders should also recommend maximum numbers of test takers at any one time, and minimum ratios of test administrators and proctors to candidates. Bidders should also indicate the level and types of support dedicated to private sites (e.g., hours that call-in help is available, level of staffing, schedule of routine maintenance).

Bidders should discuss whether they have available a network of testing centers capable of delivering the NWRC assessments. Specify the locations of these centers, the seating capacity of each, hours that each is available for testing, candidate-proctor ratios, candidate check-in and check-out procedures, security procedures, and any other characteristics considered important to evaluate the bidder's center network.

Technical Requirements
Bidders should indicate the minimum hardware and software requirements to deliver the NWRC's assessment via the bidder's delivery system and should describe any technical constraints or site issues that may be problematic. Bidders should address the system capability to support delivery, collection, and storage of audio-based items such as the Oral Language Test. Bidders should also describe the number of simultaneous users the bidder's system will support at startup and plans to grow the system, over the course of the contract, to address increasing volume of users.

Testing Accommodations
At the time they register for the WRC candidates may make a formal request for accommodations that may be needed due to a disability. The delivery partner must have in place a policy and procedures for addressing candidates with disabilities that, at a minimum, are consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Bidders should describe their process and procedures for addressing requests for accommodations, what accommodations they are prepared to offer, and how they would offer these accommodations, addressing the amount of advance notice needed for each of the site types (private, delivery partner network) and the cost implications.

Test Scoring & Reporting to Candidates
The delivery partner will score candidates' tests and ensure that score reports can be delivered to candidates at the test sites or at another address at the request of the candidate as soon as possible after completion of all four tests. The delivery partner will include a waiver form in the registration package to allow candidates to identify where they want the results sent and whether they want a provider or other specified third party to be able to review them as well.

The delivery partner will develop, implement and manage a system for rating the Oral Language Test that has the capability to rate audio files and report results for a composite score within 10 working days after the OLT was taken. Bidders should describe their capability to carry out rating of audio files for the Oral Language Test

by trained raters. Bidders should describe their experience in rating performance assessments, including audio assessments, and the process and procedures they currently have in place for training raters and monitoring the reliability of their ratings. Bidders should describe procedures they will put in place during the training of raters to ensure that there are no biases against nonnative speakers of English. Bidders should also describe their procedures for assigning test files to raters, for monitoring rater reliability, and for assuring that there are sufficient trained raters available so that OLT audio files are scored and returned to the delivery partner within 10 days after the OLT was taken.

In consultation with the NWRC, the delivery partner will develop both a score report format for reporting results to all candidates and a diagnostic report for unsuccessful candidates describing areas of strength and weakness to guide them in preparing to retake the tests. Both report forms should be available to candidates electronically and in hard copy. Bidders should provide examples that illustrate how they would address this requirement. Test scoring information is provided in this RFP under "Introduction: Scoring & Reporting."

The delivery partner's system for scoring must allow for embedded items that are not scored. The delivery partner must report the results of the nonscored pretest items only to NWRC, and NWRC must have the ability to change the nonscored pretest items as frequently as it determines necessary, without changing the scored items in the assessment.

Data & Reporting Services
The delivery partner will maintain a data base management system for all test data associated with the NWRC, including at a minimum the following data for each candidate: name and social security number, birth date, race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, test date(s), test site, test form designation, pass/fail decision, total scale score, and the record of actual responses to each item in the test. The delivery partner must put in place a seamless mechanism for NWRC to retrieve data from the delivery partner's database management system. Bidders should describe their capacity to put in place an automated system for creating and updating duplicate records on a secure NWRC server and for performing accuracy checks on the data transmitted. Bidders should also describe other mechanisms for assuring that NWRC has full access to the database, including secure online access to the database maintained by the delivery partner for the WRC certification program. Bidders should describe the mechanisms they currently provide partners for regular monitoring of test data.

The delivery partner will analyze test results and report to NWRC at least monthly in year 1 of the contract and quarterly thereafter. Analyses and reports must be structured to address all information that contributes to ongoing validation of the assessments and the credential for key populations (e.g., race and ethnicity, age, industry category), including candidate performance summaries (e.g., numbers and percentages passing and failing) aggregated by test site, state, and demographic group. Bidders should describe their standard reports in detail and should indicate any types of reports for which there would be additional costs.

The delivery partner will also conduct analyses and report quarterly on the scoring process and results for the OLT.

The delivery partner will prepare an annual Technical and Summary Report which provides a statistical analysis of year end testing results and provides recommendations to enhance the continued reliability and validity of the testing program. NWRC and the delivery partner will agree on specific issues to be addressed in the report. In addition to addressing information included in monthly or quarterly reports, the annual report will include psychometric item and test analyses (at a minimum, item difficulties, item discrimination indices, estimated test reliabilities, estimated classification reliabilities, and standard error of measurement). The report will also describe the status of all other activities conducted by the delivery partner on behalf of the NWRC including test development activities, test scoring activities, and test site certification and servicing activities, and make recommendations, as appropriate, for improvement in the conduct of these activities.

The delivery partner will be prepared to brief the NWRC Board of Directors at least once a year, as requested.

Security & Confidentiality
Bidders must describe their procedures for maintaining security through all phases and preserving the confidentiality of NWRC materials, candidate identifying information and results, and other sensitive information or data. Bidders should describe in detail the security of the delivery system and data transfers, including encryption and decryption. Bidders should also address procedures for training staff and assessment site personnel. Bidders should describe policies and procedures for handling security breaches, including cheating, for all site types, including detection and reporting to NWRC. Describe how the bidder would assist NWRC in resolving cheating, security breaches, or other irregularities. The formal agreement will provide that the delivery partner will be responsible for any and all costs associated with breaches of security resulting from the delivery partner's acts, omissions, or negligence, including the costs of replacement items.

Contingency Plans for Unexpected Situations
The delivery partner and NWRC will develop a contingency plan for responding to unexpected situations. Such situations may include, but are not limited to, site closings due to inclement weather, power failure during a test, or equipment or systems failure. Bidders should describe their existing policy and procedures for unexpected situations and how these apply to all site types.

Transfer of Assessment and Supporting Materials from WRC Development Team
Bidders should describe how they will work with the WRC test development team to ensure transfer of all relevant materials and data that support implementation of the WRC certification program. Bidders should describe the materials and data they require from the development team, and the process they will use to import the data into their own systems and databases and to ensure the quality of the data transfer. Bidders should also describe their procedures for testing the assessments once they are transferred to the delivery partner's server and for making any adaptations necessary to move from field test to full implementation.

The delivery partner will conduct a full test of all systems, including a demonstration of a test administration at three sites negotiated between the delivery partner and the NWRC. Bidders should indicate when they would conduct such a test and how they would demonstrate operational readiness.

Program Management Services

Fees and Collection

Bidders should recommend a fee structure for the assessment package which is consistent with the principles described above (Guiding Principles, p. 3). These principles are consistent with a high volume strategy for meeting operational costs. While the partners would prefer for all operational costs to be covered by testing fees, licenses, and related income as soon as possible, they recognize that in the first year or two volume may not be sufficient to support all costs *and* maintain a fee structure that will facilitate penetration of the private and public sector markets for the Credential.[6]

Bidders should propose fees for individual test takers and describe the approach they would take to setting volume break points. Bidders should also describe any other fees they would recommend, including fees for assessment sites.

The delivery partner must provide a system for collecting fees directly from test candidates and/or sites and providing accurate and timely accounting reports. A variety of payment forms, including vouchers, credit cards, and checks, should be available. The delivery partner must represent in the formal agreement that it has and shall maintain adequate insurance, including specifically the coverage of any fees handled by the delivery partner, and provide evidence of that to NWRC.

Bidders should describe how they would position the credential within their existing range of products to extend the reach of the credential into a variety of already established distribution channels and networks. Bidders should also describe their ability to work with NWRC to accommodate opportunities for large clients through a flexible fee structure based on volume, annual commitments, or other enterprise structures proposed by a potential client.

Support Services

Assistance with Candidate & Site Handbooks

The delivery partner will review the current Candidate Handbook and administration and scoring manual and will assist NWRC in revising these handbooks for implementation purposes.

The delivery partner will enable access from its website to a PDF of the Candidate Handbook, which the NWRC will provide. The delivery partner is not responsible for producing or distributing the handbook except through the download from its website.

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[6] Since the NWRC is a new organization it is difficult to accurately forecast fixed costs for the start-up year. We anticipate costs in the range of $750,000-$1,000,000.

Sending Out Certificates and Wallet Cards to Successful Candidates

The NWRC intends to provide both wall certificates and wallet cards for candidates that have passed the assessments and earned the Credential. The NWRC will design the certificates and wallet cards but will expect the delivery partner to prepare and mail wall certificates and wallet cards to successful candidates.

Bidders should describe cost implications of providing this service and propose appropriate fees to address these costs.

Registry Services

The NWRC intends to provide a national Registry of individuals who have earned the WRC and the date on which they earned it to support portability of the certification. The delivery partner will design a web-based password protected system for the Registry according to specifications provided by NWRC, and build and maintain the system.

Test Development Services

Development of Tutorial and Pretest

The delivery partner will develop a computer interactive tutorial and practice test for the assessment, using items identified by the test developer. The delivery partner must provide for public access to the preview assessment, at no charge, via the internet.

Development of Test Items and New Forms

The delivery partner will develop and validate new items for the Reading, Math and Situational Judgment tests in accordance with the existing test blueprints and in consultation with the NWRC. The delivery partner also will maintain an item bank of validated items for these assessments that will enable the delivery partner to periodically replace existing items with new items and to create new forms in a valid and reliable manner, consistent with the test blueprints and the EFF standards. The delivery partner will develop at least one new form for each test that equates with the existing form.

Bidders should describe their examination development and validation services, including the process for recruiting and training item writers and reviewers and the procedures used to ensure that the items are valid and reliable measures of the knowledge and skills required. Bidders should include a description of the parameters and capabilities of the item bank for each test. Bidders also should describe how they would develop an additional form of each of the tests in the current format and propose a timetable for developing those new forms. Some pretested items are available for use for each test.

BIDDING INSTRUCTIONS & CONDITIONS

Proposal Format
Submit proposals in four parts:
- Executive Summary
- Introduction and Bidder Information
- Technical Proposal
- Cost Proposal

Technical Proposal
The technical proposal should address all points outlined in the DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES section of this RFP. The technical proposal must not exceed 20 pages, single-spaced, in a 12-point font. Each page of the proposal containing trade secrets or similar proprietary information must be identified in boldface as confidential. Any section of a proposal that is to remain confidential should be marked clearly as confidential on the title page of that section. NWRC will keep information so marked in strict confidence. The Executive Summary and Bidder Information do not count toward the 20-page limit.

Cost Proposal
The cost proposal should itemize costs within the key cost categories identified in the description of services:
- Test Delivery Services
- Program Management Services
- Support Services
- Test Development Services

Cost proposals for each of these categories must organize the information provided in such a way that the NWRC is able to evaluate alternate options proposed for meeting the requirements.

Cost proposals must include detail regarding fees and proposed financial arrangements, including revenue sharing. Bidders should discuss all fees, such as per-candidate fee, fully itemized fees, variable per-candidate fee depending on volume, site setup or maintenance fees, licensing fees, and any others. Among fee structures proposed, include a basis for a total-fixed-cost per organization to test a specified number of candidates rather than a per-candidate fee.

NWRC encourages bidders to consider a variety of financial arrangements. NWRC is particularly interested in revenue-sharing arrangements between NWRC and the delivery partner.

Bidder Information
Proposals must describe the bidder's organization in detail, including organizational structure, size, location(s), services offered, capabilities, resources, and other information needed to give reviewers a sense of the organization as a whole. Bidders should provide evidence of their capabilities to perform the services described in this RFP in accordance with the timetable proposed in this RFP, including technological capabilities.

Bidders must provide a timeline for achievement of key benchmarks in this RFP and provide evidence of the organization's capability to address expected growth in volume in the out years (Years 3-5).

Bidders should describe the personnel to be assigned to this program, including specific descriptions of their qualifications, and their availability to NWRC staff for this program. Bidders should also describe cooperative services provided with other testing companies, educational institutions, test administrators, or other organizations relevant to the purposes of this RFP.

Bidders should also provide a list of current clients with descriptions of the services provided for each client. Provide specific descriptions of experience in programs similar to that described in this RFP and provide references.

Each bidder must submit with the proposal the name, address, and telephone number of the person(s) with authority to bind the organization, answer questions, and/or clarify the bidder's proposal.

Firm Offer
Each proposal must state that it constitutes a firm offer that will remain open and may be accepted within a period of 60 days.

Preview of Delivery System
Bidders should provide a link to a website that offers a preview of the delivery system and/or include in the proposal sufficient screen shots to give proposal reviewers an impression of the look and feel of the system.

Sample Contract
NWRC has several specific requirements for the formal agreement, including those referenced in this RFP (such as copyright assignment, responsibility for security breaches, insurance, etc.) and standard terms such as confidentiality, full indemnification of NWRC by the delivery partner for negligent or willful acts or omissions. Bidders who have specific requirements for contract language should submit a sample contract but NWRC reserves the right to reject any proposed contract terms.

Right of Rejection
Notwithstanding any other provisions of this RFP, NWRC reserves the right to reject all proposals, to waive any irregularity or informality in a proposal, and to accept any item or combination of items. It is further within the right of the NWRC to reject proposals that do not contain all elements and information requested in this RFP.

Questions & Contact Information
Interested parties may submit questions to the NWRC no later than 5 March 2006. Questions may be sent via e-mail to sstein@uschamber.com.

NWRC will formulate responses to all questions submitted and will distribute all questions and NWRC responses via e-mail to the entire RFP distribution list. Questions and NWRC responses will be disseminated on 15 March 2006.

To learn more about the NWRC, the certification, and the test, bidders are encouraged to visit these websites: www.uschamber.com/cwp/strategies/workreadinesscredential.htm and www.eff.cls.utk.edu/workreadiness

Proposal Deadline & Delivery Instructions
Bidders must deliver 6 copies of the technical proposal and of the cost proposal no later than 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on 31 March 2006 to:
RFP for NWRC Test Delivery Partner
ATTN: Sondra Stein
Center for Workforce Preparation
US Chamber of Commerce
1615 H St NW
Washington, DC 20062
Proposals must be sealed and labeled on the outside of the package to indicate clearly that they are in response to the RFP for the NWRC test delivery partner, as indicated in the address information.

Proposals received after the deadline will not be accepted. Proposals submitted by facsimile or e-mail will not be accepted. Proposals will not be returned.

Evaluation Criteria
Proposals will be evaluated on the basis of responsiveness to each requirement of the RFP, bidder experience and reputation, evidence of technological capability, adequacy of staffing and staff availability, training and experience of staff, desirability of proposed partnership or financial arrangement, and cost effectiveness. Only information that is received in response to this RFP will be evaluated; reference to information previously submitted will not be evaluated.

Contract Negotiations
After a review of the proposals, and possible oral presentations and/or sample reviews, NWRC intends to enter into contract negotiations with the most qualified bidders. Those negotiations will include all aspects of services and fees.

Duration & Renewal of Contract
Any contract issued as a result of this RFP is expected to be for a period of three to five years, with contractual contingencies for termination upon inadequate performance. A contract may be renewed without competitive bid.

Additional Information
Possible Oral Presentation
NWRC reserves the right to request selected finalists to make an oral presentation to a review panel. Selected finalists will receive notice about scheduling and location of any requested presentation.

Proposal Costs
Any costs incurred by bidders in preparing, submitting, or making presentations of proposals are the sole responsibility of the bidder. NWRC will not reimburse any bidder for any costs incurred in connection with this RFP.

Governing Law

Any dispute that relates to this RFP and any agreement that is subsequently signed as a result of this RFP will be resolved by arbitration in Washington, DC, except with respect to any equitable relief to enforce NWRC's intellectual property or other rights, and in accordance with Washington, DC law then in effect.

Confidentiality Agreement

Throughout the duration of this RFP and the agreement term, bidders and any agents or affiliates of a bidder agree to maintain confidentiality of any information or data disclosed or provided by NWRC in this RFP or in the course of negotiations and must secure from the NWRC prior written approval to release any information that pertains to the potential work or activities covered by this RFP, or a subsequent agreement. Failure to adhere to this requirement may result in disqualification of the bidder's proposal or termination of the agreement, or legal action to enforce NWRC's rights.